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ABSTRACT

A 1-year investigation of writing took place in an urban second grade and focused on three low-income African American children with different reading abilities in their third year of whole language instruction. Data collection included written artifacts, structured interviews at the beginning and end of the school year, and field notes. Artifacts revealed the ways the children structured their texts and used written language features. What children wrote also captured information about the connection between writing and their intellectual and social lives. Interview data focused on gaining understanding about how these children saw themselves as writers and what they know about writing itself. Findings indicated that all three children experienced growth as writers in this teacher's classroom. Individual differences in reading made a difference in the writing they produced. However, the writing of less and more proficient children did not differ greatly. Results also demonstrated that these children were highly engaged and courageous writers. This finding cuts across ability with no differences among the three children. The data studied indicated that writing was a rich source of social and intellectual stimulation that gave rise to literate thinking and action. (Contains 54 references; appendixes contain rubrics for text structures and written language characteristics, and the interview questions.) (Author/RS)

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WHEN AUTHORS GO TO SLEEP THEY WAKE UP IN THE MORNING AND THEY WRITE ABOUT IT" : A REPORT ON YOUNG CHILDREN' S WRITING IN WHOLE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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RUNNING HEAD: CHILDREN'S WRITING IN WHOLE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This one year investigation of writing took place in an urban second grade. The study focused on three low-income African American children with different reading abilities experiencing their third year of whole language instruction. Data collection included written artifacts, structured interviews at the beginning and end of the school year, and field notes. Artifacts revealed the ways the children structured their texts and used written language features. What children wrote also captured information about the connection between writing and their intellectual and social lives. Interview data focused on gaining understanding about how these children saw themselves as writers and what they knew about writing itself. Findings indicated that all three children experienced growth as writers in this teacher's classroom. Individual differences in reading made a difference in the writing they produced. However, the writing of less and more proficient children did not differ greatly. Results also demonstrated that these children were highly engaged and courageous writers. This finding cut across ability with no differences between the three children. The data studied indicated that writing was a rich source of social and intellectual stimulation that gave rise to literate thinking and action.

"WHEN AUTHORS GO TO SLEEP THEY WAKE UP IN THE MORNING AND THEY WRITE ABOUT IT" : A REPORT ON YOUNG CHILDREN'S WRITING IN WHOLE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

This study focuses on three, African-American children's writing in an urban classroom with whole language, balanced instruction. These low-income children were part of a previous study that compared children experiencing a third year of whole language instruction to children who made a transition to skills-based instruction after two years in whole language instruction (Freppon, 1995). The children in both groups were similar in reading ability, age, educational background, and socioeconomic status. That comparative research project found that the group that did not make the transition to skills-based instruction, wrote more, and had more positive perceptions about writing and themselves than the skills-based group.

This paper focuses examples of these three children's writing, and their views and understandings about the making of written language as they continued in whole language instruction. The investigation contributes to a better understanding of the acquisition of literate thinking and action in young children. Literate thinking and action includes both affective and cognitive responses to school-based literacy events (Heath, 1983; 1986). The expression of knowledge and skills shown in written artifacts, expression of personal responses captured in interview discussions, and children's every-day-action in the classroom evidence their literate thinking and action. This article provides information on: (a) what these children actually wrote, (b) how they perceived writing in this classroom and how they perceived themselves as writers, and (c) how their parents perceived the children's written language activities at home. It provides longitudinal information on children who differed in reading proficiencies. Thus, the study responds to the call for research that accounts for

diversity in children's learning development and their daily instruction (Daiute, 1993).

Background, Theoretical Perspectives, and Rationale

Several bodies of research contributed to this study. Construction of knowledge about written language is a major aim of education. Learning theorist and researchers of writing such as Fulwiler, (1987) Vygotsky (1962) Emig, (1981), Luria (1971) and Britton (1982) have shown that writing is critical to learning. The complexities and internal organization required by the act of symbolizing thought in written language is fundamental. Written communication is a powerful instrument for the development of human intellect (Goody,1977). Throughout recent history and in today's research, students' ability to act as communicator and audience is seen as a strong indicator of their intellectual development (Calhoun, 1970).

Writing ability is known to be an excellent predictor of academic success and is a universal standard by which students are judged. Writing promotes critical and reflective thinking. (Wells, Chang, and Maher, 1990). In composing one must systematically engage in highly complex cognitive activity. This current study used the Wells, Chang, and Maher (1990) and Heath (1986, 1991) view of literate thinking and action as: (a) the conscious exploitation of written language as an instrument for thinking , and (b) engagement in and persistence with writing. The current study provides writing data that demonstrates literacy achievement in minority and low-income children who all too often do not experience success in public education (Smith-Burke, 1989; Strickland, 1994).

The work of Delpit (1988; 1991) raised the issue of minority children's learning in writing process, or whole language instruction. Delpit questions

whether African American children can successfully "take from" classrooms designed and taught by white teachers. Given the additional gender difference between female, white teachers and African American boys Delpit voices concern about the success of male students.

The focus of this study was not on possible outcomes due to race or cultural differences between the teacher and the children. This investigation is, however, one of the few studies that can address Delpit's concerns to some degree. This investigation took place in a "natural setting" (existing through no act of the researcher or school person) in which a middle- class, white teacher and African American, low-income children worked together for a year. Thus, these differences were present and were an important part of the classroom context. The study contributes data, albeit it limited, on a topic of great interest to many researchers and teachers. Writing is critical in the intellectual development of young children and in their personal view of self-as-learner. This study is timely in providing information on the children we worry about (Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1989) in an instructional environment that is both very popular, and under increasing scrutiny.

In the past, writing research contributed much to our understanding about young children's development in relation to orthography (Clay,1975; Ferriero & Terberosky, 1983) and phonology and spelling development (Gentry, 1987; Read, 1971). Recent research in the field of emergent literacy focuses on young children's writing development (Sulzby, 1992) and trying to "untangle" the puzzle of how they learn to write. As children become writers many factors transact including social, psychological, and linguistic. Dyson's (1991) work highlights the complexities of learning to write and in particular the influence of social interactions. In a 1995 study, Dyson notes that young

children need among other things, the courage to write. Courage is supported by a positive view-of-self and a "can do" attitude. In addition, metacognitive knowledge about what it takes to engage deeply in writing is essential to sustaining it. The sociocultural view (Britton 1970; Green, 1982; Heath, 1983) portrays children's writing as a way into an intellectual life. This life is not unlike the intellectual life of mature, adult writers. Conflict, longing, engagement in family, community experiences, and the world of fiction, become part of learning to use writing as a way of making sense for one's self and others. Writing is the creation of meaning.

Newkirk's longitudinal study (1989) of middle-class children in process-based classrooms and highly literate homes, helped demonstrate that environment or context has a strong influence on text structure and quality. The instructional experiences described in Newkirk are highly similar to those in whole language classrooms. Newkirk's work also shows that children's writing different kinds of text structures is important. It is through such early writing experiences that children are believed to learn how to write the persuasive and analytical texts needed in the upper grades (Newkirk,1989).

Of interest in the current study were the kinds of writing produced by potentially "at risk" children who had a background in whole language and were currently in a whole language classroom. Their writing and comments about writing were studied for evidence of literate thinking and action, and understanding of the complexities and challenge of the making of written language. Specifically, text structures, productivity, and writing interviews provided triangulated data sources.

Method

Sites and Participants

Three second-grade children in a midwestern, urban area participated in this study. The majority of the families in the community were low-income and received some form of public assistance. The socioeconomic status of the children in this study was determined by home visits, community demographic information, and participation in the federal lunch program at school. The researcher knew the children well having followed their learning closely through kindergarten and first grade in whole language instruction. The second-grade whole language classroom observations, included use of field notes, artifact collection, and audio and video tapes. These observations took place twice monthly throughout the school year.

The children were originally selected at random from a pool of children on the federally assisted lunch program. Of the original group of six focal learners, two had moved away before second grade. In the current study, one non-conventional writer was excluded because participation required "conventional" writing, i.e. writing that is connected and can be read by an adult (Sulzby, 1992). In general, the three participating children represented the average and above average readers in their classroom. Conclusions about their written language abilities were based on sample data collected over time, the researcher's interpretations, and teacher judgement. Reading miscue (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987) data indicated that Schemeka and Isaac were moderately proficient to proficient readers on samples that were near their grade level. Interest level also played a role in their fluency. If the reading material was more difficult, or on an unfamiliar topic they read in ways considered moderately proficient with less fluency. In contrast, for most of the

school year Willie read with less fluency than Schemeka and Isaac. He did not select books as challenging, and he sometimes over used the graphophonic cueing system. In writing narrative report cards and in her conversations the teacher used the terms "average" and "below" or "above" to describe these three children during the school year. In addition, standardized tests supported conclusions about their individual differences. It was also the case that time was a factor in the children's written language growth and development.

Schemeka demonstrated average proficiency in reading and writing for nearly the entire time. Isaac, was similar to Schemeka in reading for most of the year, however, he became more proficient toward the end and was the strongest writer among the three. After reading in below average ways much of the time, Willie began to excel toward the end of second grade. Although his writing improving steadily, it did not show the same rate of growth as reading at that time. Isaac and Schemeka wrote with ease independently and with others while Willie clearly preferred the support of peer or group interactions. All three children were persistent, highly engaged, and showed a keen interest in accuracy. For example, they verbally expressed considerable concern about having their writing make sense and correct spelling.

This study used a design appropriate for qualitative research (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) aimed at describing children's school writing. Multiple data sources gathered over time support the findings. A holistic analysis of writing helps capture, in an flexible and economical way, the quality of young children's writing. Fluency is a indicator of good writing (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl,1983) and is an inseparable part of other factors used to judge writing quality. For example, sense of audience is important and affects language use, purpose,

and fluency itself (Raphael, Englert, & Kirschner, 1989; Tierney, & Shanahan, 1991)

The identification of the second-grade classroom as whole language was carefully carried out. Teacher interview (Burke, 1980) and self-identification, classroom observations, DeFord's (1985) Theoretical Orientations to Reading Profile, and administrator's recommendation were all part of the process. Because the study was limited to one teacher with a whole language perspective, this classroom represented an instantiation of this curriculum. The instruction, shown in the teacher's philosophy, reading materials, and teaching techniques remained consistent throughout the entire school year. The teacher frequently discussed her instruction in terms of "being whole language" and her descriptions and actual practice fit those associated with whole language principles (Dudley-Marling, 1995). This teacher's instruction was also balanced in that she initiated specific lessons and supported children initiated lessons, explicitly taught skills and strategies combined with rich literature interactions, she also used both children/teacher initiated curricula and the school and grade level curriculum expectations (for further discussion of balanced instruction see Au 1997, Freppon & Dahl in press, and Weaver, in press).

Home visits were conducted at the end of the school year. During these visits parents were asked how they thought the children were doing in school, and what kinds of reading and writing behaviors they saw at home. The parents were asked if the children's reading and writing acts were about the same as the year before and if they had noticed any changes. The same questions specific to these inquires were asked of each parent and all visits included conversations about anything else the parents wanted to discuss. The

researcher wrote brief notes during the home visits and elaborated on these notes immediately after leaving the child's home.

The classroom environment reflected a view of literacy learning as a social and developmental process in which children's approximations to conventional reading and writing and their errors are a natural part of successful learning. Curriculum and instruction reflected the perspective that written language is learned in functional and meaningful contexts. Reading materials consisted of children's literature, trade books, information books, a variety of print sources from the community, and the teachers' and children's writings. The areas of study and ways of learning arose from the needs, interests, and expertise of students and the teacher. Student self-selection of reading and writing tasks was a part of every day classroom life. Teaching and learning reflected the apprenticeship model that included explicit instruction on a routine basis. The following discussion provides a representative description of classroom interactions during the school year in this second-grade, whole language classroom.

On a typical day the children began by working independently or in small groups for the first hour. Students were expected to choose to read or write. At times one child or a small group of children worked on a writing task. However, most learners chose reading. A low noise level or "hum of voices " was maintained as many children read orally. The teacher circulated among the children, read with individuals, observed, and kept notes on children and materials. When the teacher read with a child, she consistently taught some reading or writing strategies and skills. For example, this teacher pointed out the need to reread and pay attention to beginning letter sounds if a word was misread. When the teacher observed a child's writing or was asked for help she

also taught skills such as spelling (noting correct or incorrect words), punctuation, and use of capital letters. Writing strategies or "thinking like a writer" were also stressed. Children were asked about their desires to publish a particular piece, if they thought their writing made sense, and they were given support in getting writing started. Conversations about why a child was writing or what he/she wanted to say were frequent. Teacher notes were written on plans and individual children's strengths and needs. As the school year progressed the children continued to read individually or they read together in small groups in which the same book, usually a chapter book, was read by all. Some reading groups were begun by the children themselves, and some by the teacher who asked specific children to read together. Children often wrote together; however, some children also moved to private places and asked peers not to bother them when they wrote. Learners were expected to use this hour to gain fluency and to try challenging or new books and to work on writing.

This first hour was followed by a 'whole group time' in which the children gathered on the rug and the teacher read aloud. Readings included songs, stories, and poetry. Discussion was in a conversational mode with clear expectations that children would participate. In this group period the teacher often focused on what " hooked" readers on stories. That is, children discussed what they liked and thought about the stories or other reading. In this way writing was explored. For example, children and teacher critiqued what writers said and what they though made good sense or a good story. Specifics such as plot, character actions, and making inferences were also discussed.

Modeling and demonstration of reading and writing were a primary focus throughout the day. An afternoon whole group period included teacher initiated, explicit skill teaching such as reading strategies, use of syntax and

letter/sound cues, spelling in word families, and editing. Children's writing was usually shared at this time. However, skill instruction also occurred throughout the morning. Materials for instruction were usually children's actual writing or reading. Although not a focus of the study, the afternoon period was observed and the teacher sometimes discussed it.

Following the morning whole group time, the teacher often introduced one or more planned activities such as writing a big book, creating a mural, or writing a letter to an author. Throughout the year these activities involved particular themes such as author studies or science projects. Children could choose a teacher planned activity or any other reading or writing work during this period. In this period, children often participated in several activities and some read one book or wrote on a single piece the entire period. Some chose to participate in self-selected reading or writing and the teacher provided activity. Consistently, children read, wrote, and talked with each other and the teacher about reading and writing content and how to accomplish reading and writing. Again as in the opening hour, the teacher monitored the class, taught individual children and small groups. She listened to children read, read with them, and held writing conferences. In writing conferences, skills were taught, and presentations of children's writings to the class were discussed. For example, the child and the teacher might work on spelling, sentence structure, capital letters, and story details. They also made decisions about options such as publishing, reading the piece aloud to the class, or making a poster.

During reading and writing work time, the teacher also taught small reading groups based on student need and interest. These groups varied throughout the year and although they were established by the teacher selecting specific children, others were free to join any group as it progressed.

The children and teacher talked about books, read together, and read independently. Specific skills and strategy teaching on the cueing systems operating in written language occurred. The teacher also held 'Book Talks,' and in these small groups she read stories of similar themes and or writing style and encouraged children to discuss these literary elements.

Finally, this teacher was white and middle class. Ms. L. had a masters degree and Reading Recovery training. She was conscientious and caring. She had taught for over 10 years, enjoyed the children, and was extremely hard working. Ms. L. had a supportive administration. Evaluation in her classroom was carried out through observations, anecdotal notes, and reading and writing samples. Assessment were both process and product oriented.

Data Sources and Analysis

Several data sources were used. Identification of a focus for the analysis of the children's writing occurred during the previous, year-long study of their interpretations during a third year of whole language instruction (Author, in press). The researcher's repeatedly reviewed the artifacts (Glaser, 1969) and decided on tentative ways to analyze the writing. The work of Newkirk (1989) on the range, forms, and complexities of children's writing, Purcell-Gates' (1988) study of children's knowledge of written register, and previous research on written language use (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen 1975; Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983) contributed to final development of the rubrics used. (see Appendices A and B). Some categories in written language characteristics overlapped and care was taken to select the characteristic(s) most evident in the writing. Grid construction (Miles & Huberman, 1984) documented specific information on each child's writing over time.

Over 100 artifacts in two collections, journal writings from September to December and all the writings collected in April, were analyzed for: (a) text structures, and (b) use of specific written language characteristics. Using conservative judgement and yet making an effort to do justice to the writing, each artifact was marked for: (a) the text structure it was most like, and, (b) for the kind of and number of written characteristics. For example, three for a piece that had title and ending, dialogue, and use of lively and engaging text.

Two trained raters coded a random selection of one-third of the Journal and April data. Interrater agreement ranged from 85% (identification of text structure), to 100% (presence or absence of written language characteristics). To explore fluency, a simple word count was made and averaged.

In addition to identification of written language characteristics, reviews for literary features such as conflict, theme, and personally meaningful topics (Lukens, 1976) were done on the Journal and April artifacts. This information was written up in memos. These memos also contributed to a systematic check and comparison of data in these three learners' writing interviews. For example, a search for consistency and or disconfirming evidence between their stated views and classroom behaviors was conducted. Beyond the Journal and April data sources, other written artifacts were collected during regular classroom observations. Samples were selected randomly from this data set and analyzed in the same manner. This additional data source served as a final check for consistencies and inconsistencies in the Journal and April data.

Writing interviews conducted at the beginning and end of school provided information on the children's knowledge of writing itself and perceptions about themselves as writers. These interviews drew upon those used in previous research (Author,1991; van Kraayenoord, Elkins, Ashman,

1989). In addition to the 25 interview questions (see Appendix C) analyzed in the previous study, some additional questions were used in the current study. Initial categories were based on the broad units that organized the interview questions. Included were: (1) a view of the nature of writing and role of prior knowledge, (2) personal variables including attitude toward writing, (3) knowledge of characteristics of good writers and problems and strategies of good writers, (4) their own specific writing behaviors, and (5) metacognitive knowledge and awareness. Writing interview prompts were limited and unclear responses eliminated.

Interview information was organized into units and individual grids, by child and by time were constructed to further reduce and study the data. As part of the repeated review process, these girds were checked against original interviews for substantiation. In addition, field notes were reviewed to search for disconfirming data. A previous study (Author in press) had shown that these children, as members of a larger whole language group, held a positive view of writing and of themselves as writers throughout the second grade. Thus, growth or change over the school year was not a focus. Rather, analysis focused on describing Schemeka, Willie, and Issac's thinking as writers. Excerpts of their interviews were consolidated and used to profile each child's interpretations. Although some direct quotes are included, in other cases these learners' oral responses have been changed, e.g. words added for clarification, to make the text more accessible (Cleary, 1991).

Results

The following information summarizes the outcomes on the 74 journal writings produced during the first three months of school.

Over three-fourths (77%) had more than one written language feature.
One third (34%) of the writings were initial paragraph and early exposition.
Nearly one-half (43%) were structured in story-like or story form with over half being story-like.
For fluency, the average number of words was 46.

Poetry, and declarative sentences, or writing that was a version of a familiar storybook made up the rest of the children's writings. The samples below are representative of the journal writings. Original spellings have been changed only when necessary to facilitate reading.

The Holwen

I am going to the hern house - was it scare. My Friends come over (and) then we goin. We see the gose it was scare. We see the vhepie it was scare. We see the big spider, it was scare. Then it was time to go home. THE END (Willie)

My Family

I love my family We go evayer together We play games to gether. We love each other Just because sometimes we fight doen't meen that we don't love each other enenay more We will still love each other no mater how big we get or how little we get We will still love each other THE END (Schemeka)

Holwen hunt

I had a hunt on holwen It was about pumpkins I wanted a pumpkin so bad I could see one so I get a hunt to get me a pumpkin When they came back the bake no pumpkins " Were is my pumpkin?" We did not find a pumpkin - go get me a pumpkin now or I am going to make you out of (a) bagen. OK ...soon they came bake with my pumpkin and I ata my pie (Issac)

The use of imagery and a well defined theme is evident in these young author's writing. Repetition for effect, as in the first sample, and the use of writing for personal expression and exploration in the second contribute to the quality of writing. The third sample has essential story elements such as an

initiating event, a problem and a solution, and a conclusion (which is very satisfying in this case!). Although this last example was written by the strongest student, Issac, Schemeka also integrated many of these elements into her writing. Although Willie's piece is less sophisticated, his writing clearly shows a strong sense of story and an inviting style. All three children produced meaningful, effective prose. The author's voice is strong, and sense of audience evident in each example.

As noted above poetry was also produced during this time. Examples are shown as the children wrote them as nearly as possible.

My house
My house gos up - and up- and up-
and up- and up - and up and up

Cras / (Issac)

I like pizza
mmmm pizzas good
Ices Creme good
too
Me to me to
me to me to
how I like Ice cme
I do I do I do I do
I do to
A VERY One like's Ice creme
The end (Willie)

In these poetry samples the children's sense of rhyme and form becomes clear. Their writing demonstrates an awareness of audience and sense of humor. The use of large graphics and playful endings makes these poems satisfy both writer and reader. These children's compact verse does what poetry does best -- it evokes emotional experience. Interestingly the most

proficient writer, Issac, was not the only child writing poetry. Willie, the least proficient reader and writer of the three learners, also engaged in this form of expression. In the case of these two examples, Willie wrote more and, like Issac, used placement of the words on the page to enhance the poetic form.

These second-grade writers generally used lively and engaging language and text-like phrases. Because the children themselves decided on their own writing topics and ideas, this finding shows literary development and strongly suggests an integration of reading and creating good literature. The following excerpts from completed pieces and fragments of writing (stories begun and not finished) further indicate the playful and thoughtful ways these young authors experimented with written language.

> " Millions of years ago when dinosaurs were living they roamed the land ... there lived a strange creature."
>
> " One bright moonlit ...."
>
> " My name is Willie the great. I am a detective. Tonight I got in trouble."
>
> " Yesterday, my dad surprised me when he came home from work with a dog."

During the month of April these three children generated 39 pieces of writing. Thus, in only one month they wrote approximately half as many pieces as they in the autumn, three month period. Other outcomes are summarized below.

> Over 90% percent of the writing had one or more written language feature showing an average 13% increase.
> Fluency was greater with the number of words in each piece rising from an average of 46 to 59.
> Approximately one-third (35%)of their writing was organized in initial paragraphs and early exposition, showing no increase from the autumn.
> Stories complete with all elements increased to 41% which was double that of autumn.

Some new genre emerged in the spring. Several pieces of non-fiction and one fairy tale were written. One piece that began as non-fiction had persuasive elements. In it, Issac argued for protection of the South American rain forest . He created a situation in which he first showed the importance of the rain forest and then became personally involved in an adventure in which many trees were saved from destruction. Issac also created an interesting conflict in this complex piece. Poor people, from whom he had to protect the trees, pleaded with him to let them cut the trees because they badly needed to earn money.

The samples below, two from each child, show the kind of writing these three children were doing by springtime.

Schemeka

> I love my daddy. When I'm sick he taoks care of me. he put his hand on my forhand and he says "your hot" he puts his hands all over my face he would say " your geting hoter" Then I'll say"help I have to purk" When my mom come home she fell my hand to. Then she'll say " you be ok" " I hope so" I said A few days leter I was.
>
> Jump Ropening
>
> One day I was jump ropening with my friends. I jumped so high that I touched the clouds. Then I tired to get down but I couldn't I was stuck. Then I began to cry. Then I look to the right (and) I saw a woman. She said " Who are you?" I am Schemeka Who are you?" "I am Mailpa I live here." " You do?" " Yes." " Do you eat? " "Yes I eat apples from the apple tree." "How do you sleep?" " I sleep on the clouds." "Do you have ..." "Don't bother me kid!" " (All) I want to say is can you help me?" "Help you whet?" "Go back jump ropening with my frands at school?" "Sufe tap your feet three times and say there's no place like school, there's no place like school. Then I was still jump ropening and I never went that jump - - that high agien.
>
> The End

Willie

> Once a pan a time back in the 80 there was God and he was aloan in Soa. Somebody save his life it was a bad man. He had a free people that was not his so they hang him on a cross. He hang

there for to years an 1 1/2 day. So people come to earth and he is way up there and we down here. That way we love the planet earth. He made us when he got down here.

To Washing

One day I waht to Washing. And I went to the president and siad, What going on in Ohio? Thise police mans bet up the balck palopes and you got to stop this police man. Ok. I got a airpane to take us to Ohio and every where something is on the news. See some police man beting up a balck poison. We are in Ohio and they meet the president. Then we seen a police man beting up a balck poison. Lats stop them befor thay will bet him. His is poll, he can't afor to go to a hospital.

Issac

Once there was a tiger with wings and it lived in a zoo. But everyone went to the elephangs. So one night he snuk out of the zoo and flew away. He flew to a boy's house. And his name was Willie and woke hime up and said Who are you and how did you get here. go now or I will call my parents and they will cath you and take you bake to the zoo. No, no, no, dot take me bake to the zoo. I hated bake there they dot even feed me. And they pay no attention to me. Thats the reason I ran away. Okay I will not tell my mom that you are here. Thank you very much I appreciate that. Now how to get the people to pay more attention to you. I will make you famous and show you off and then when all the people notice you then I will take you back to the zoo. They are probably looking for you.

The 3 Boys

Once there was a boy and he work in a fatery. He had a wife and 3 kids and a nice house and car. He works till 9:00 in the morning. He sleeps in the daytime. But there was a problem. The boss was out of town and who was going to run the factory? So he decided he was going to run the factory. It will be his first time. So the next day he got the plans done and went to work. "Let's get to work clening this place up." So averybody went to work. And when they was done that place was the cleanest work sope in town. It went good at first but then it was lunch time. Then (there was) a food fight. Food was avey wher and and they had to clen avey last pice of food. Then the boss came in and showed what they wher dorng. They got Fiered.

THE END

The following section presents excerpts from Schemeka, Willie, and Isaac's writing interviews. These excerpts provide descriptive information on their understandings about writing, and themselves as writers. These findings

help shed light on each child's individuality, and the depth and range of their thinking. Because Schemeka, Willie, and Issac maintained a positive stance throughout the year, their interviews did not show growth per say from pre to post sample. Rather, their interviews revealed a breadth of thinking and an ability to critically consider writing and themselves as writers. Importantly, after three years in whole language instruction, these low-income urban, African American children showed that they thought about writing in sophisticated, mature, and highly motivated ways.

Schemeka

> I like to write because I be writing at home. I be reading some books and then I get some paper and write... People get writing ideas. From reading stories or from their mother or father telling them things they want to know about. And then they get to be another good writer. Well if I don't know what to write about I just write and write until I can find something to write about . I like to write stories, I feel happy. And because I like to do things that I like to do and read things different. I read things that I never hearded of and I want to write about it. Then I write.
>
> Yes, writing help me read better, it help me understand what I'm writing. I can write mostly everything in this room. Writing is fun. I like it a lot. I have to write until it is time to clean up. But sometimes I don't feel like writing. I been writing some bad stories lately. Some words are hard for me to spell. It's a good thing we have dictionaries! I like both (writing with others or alone). With myself I don't get into trouble. With my friend, she writes, I just draw, and I get myself into trouble. Sometimes my friends helps me draw. We both have to do something (writing) or we get

into trouble. You write better when you read books and you read better when you write.

In these interview statements Schemeka shows an impressive range of literate thinking. She is very confident and knows how to get writing started and sustained (an enviable position for writers of any age!). Schemeka provides an almost painful critique of her writing, but does not dwell on the negative. No Pollyanna, she clearly appreciates the satisfaction of writing. A basic and important strategy of understanding the relationship between reading and writing is evident. Also shown, is her understanding of her teacher's expectations of appropriate conduct in this whole language classroom. Children are to write.

Willie

No, it's (writing) not hard because the teacher says go to work, and I do. Like me and my friends we all write together, that 's how we make all the pages. That's why I write a lot. I just want to keep writing and writing until it is time to stop. Make it different, fix it, change it a little, when you are tired sometimes you mess up. It's fun and you can draw pictures if you want to. If you can't read, you ain't gonna write no better.

I like any kind of writing except long words. You can write about things you did like going to Chucky Cheese or your birthday, or getting a bike and riding to your grandma's. With friends, like with friends you get do more pages and draw more. I don't like it by myself, it's harder, but sometimes you concentrate better by yourself. I can write and spell. I try to do my best. I make it long so I can publish it. That first story be still in my mind. I am still thinking about it.

Willie's observed classroom preference for writing with others was supported by his interview discussions. This child knew he worked best in collaboration. It helped him "write a lot" and "make it long" so he could publish. Willie is a proud writer, his responses reveal confidence and the knowledge that reading supports writing. He is a thoughtful writer, remembering his "first story." The fact that Willie's writing was very important to him was also indicated by his topics. As previously shown in his writing artifact, Willie wrote passionately about things such as a racially charged violent event between a suspect and the police.

Isaac

> It helps you. When you go to college and you have to go to the board and you can spell that cause you use to write all the time! I been writing since I was in Head Start. Cause I got all these stories done and took them home. I got a big stack. But if I'm in a bad mood, I don't want to write long stories. Like the first day of school it was a disaster, everybody was just playing with their money. Like sometimes if I'm stuck on a word like hippopotamus or something, it's a problem. I get good ideas when the teacher reads books. I think it's a good idea and I write about that stuff. I really feel good! I think about a story, like what I said when I go to bed. When authors go to sleep they wake up in the morning and then they write about it.
>
> Writing is real fun. It has adventures in it. I do it all the time. I'm a very good writer, because every day people come up to me and say, how do you spell this and that. If it's a real good story and the teacher is proud of me I want to write it all over again! Keep trying, don't be a quitter. Authors do have problems I do too. It takes them one year to make one

> story. Like what to think of. Decide where the story is going to take place. Like learn about the animal they are going to write about. Sound the word out or get a book to find it. Sometimes I write by myself and sometimes with friends. Like when I write about something that happened to me like when I fell out of the tree. With friends we copy stories, we copy titles, (then) we make our own version of it. I have a book started in my folder it's about dinosaurs.

Issac loves to write and he thinks about it frequently. Sometimes even when he goes to sleep, he has writing on his mind. Issac's discussions support the fact that he was highly productive. Too, he is confident, proud, and engaged. Issac's responses also support observed classroom behaviors. He wrote well on his own and with peers. These excerpts show highly literate thinking, he understands the importance of theme, setting, and purpose. Issac knows writing is hard work and that writing skills are valuable, especially for a college bound person.

All three of these children, who varied in reading ability, were similar in the confident thinking and engaged stance. Metacognitive knowledge seemed similarly high. These young authors knew about the joys and struggles of an intellectual life. Schemeka, Willie, and Issac knew *what it takes to write*, and they strategically undertook the challenge.

Conclusions and Discussion

The current study helps shed light on young, low-income African American children's written language knowledge in an urban whole language classroom. The results provide information on their conscious exploitation of written language as an instrument for thinking , and their engagement with writing.

This investigation accounted for day to day classroom experiences. It included young children who represented a common range of development in learning. The research design itself, limitation of one classroom, and the small sample prohibits generalizing the results. This report documented what occurred in particular circumstances, not what these children may have written or thought under other circumstances. The study is limited to children of average and above average reading proficiency. It did not investigate the mechanics of writing or carry out a study of idea development, coherence, or possible gender differences. The study is also limited in other ways including socioeconomic factors, and the age of the children.

The findings of this descriptive study may resonate with readers as they identify with other, similar learners. This is to be expected in a case study approach, which has the ability to illuminate the "universal" (Yin,1984). Although the study is limited to one teacher's instantiation of whole language, it shows that these children responded positively to their instruction. Moreover an earlier investigation showed similar positive outcomes with these and other children (Co-author & Author, 1995)

As noted in the classroom description, the children's teacher was well trained, hard working, conscientious, and caring. She explicitly taught skills and strategies, had over a decade of experience, and had a supportive administration. All these variables may not exist nor interact in the same ways in other whole language classrooms. Teachers who are new to this instructional approach must be ever mindful of the importance of not only providing the most familiar whole language instructional experiences such as meaningful interactions with high quality literature, but also those less obvious to some people. Whole language instruction is not Laissez-faire. Skill and

strategy teaching is integral to these child-centered classrooms (see McIntyre & Pressley, 1996, for discussion).

Findings in the current study indicated a positive outcome for these low-income, African American children in an urban classroom. From every indication the children enjoyed writing. Their written products showed growth in many desired areas throughout the year. Social realization came about through writing about topics important to these children. The strong role of social interaction found in this study contributes to that of Dyson (1991,1995).

Issac, was a strong writer and gained much as a reader. Schemeka began with less expertise and gained also. Willie began with less fluency than Schemeka but gained considerably at end of the year. Although there was a difference in writing quality among them, all three children wrote often and well. Thus, ability mattered, but it did not *over determine* what these children accomplished. The writing of these children highlighted a rich intellectual life. As literate thinkers they engaged deeply with the making of written language. Their discussions and written artifacts indicated that they understood writing itself. These young children differed in academic proficiency yet they were similar in their disposition toward writing. Schemeka, Willie, and Issac were all proactive. They had the courage and skills to write. Artifacts and talk indicated that they understood how to begin and sustain writing, and strategies to employ when they had problems. They understood the recursive nature of writing, and themselves as authors. The children took initiative and also appeared to value both decoding and meaning-based elements. For example, they were interested in spelling and in making their writing enjoyable and interesting to the audience. They perceived writing in a realistic way. While it was not all "fun and games", they clearly valued writing and showed they considered writing a

positive and challenging experience. Importantly, an emotional center was evident in their talk and in their writing.

Finally, a home /school connection was also found. Home visits with Schemeka, Willie, and Issac's parents provided additional information on the activity of these young authors (Author, in press). For example, Issac's dad noted that because his son used so much paper in writing at home, he purchased a ream of writing paper for Issac. Similarly, Schemeka's father said that his daughter ..."couldn't write enough!" (parent's emphasis) Willie's mother related that her son often wrote about things the family had done together. For example, after coming home from dinner at a restaurant.

A good story reveals life experiences, invokes memory, and shows an understanding of character. Schemeka, Willie, and Issac wrote good stories. These children explored complex issues and used writing as a vehicle for self discovery, and making sense of the world. The results of this study contribute to the research on potentially "at -risk" children in whole language instruction. Because of the extreme importance of this line of research the findings should be considered with care and much more study must be carried out. Far too much is at risk, and far too much controversy is currently being voiced to ignore the need further research.

Suggestions for Research.

Studies of children who do not achieve conventional reading or writing (Sulzby, 1985, 1992) in whole language classrooms are needed. The additional support these children need at school, home, and in the community must be investigated. Needed also are longitudinal investigations that follow learners across their elementary school years in whole language and other kinds of instruction.

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Appendix A

Text Structures

Letter, Card, or Poster	Writing is organized in formalized structure, i.e. Dear Santa...., Don't Pollute the Earth.
Declarative Statement	Writing is structured of one or more declarative statements, i.e. My mom made me get on the beast at King's Island.
Narrative-like List	Writing has both narrative and list-like qualities, i.e. I like pizza, I like tacos,
Early exposition	Writing focused on a category or topic such as family and consists of an assertion and related sentence or clause, i.e. My brother is fun. He always plays with me.
Initial Paragraphs	Clusters of sentences or clauses including at least three that are closely associated or thematic, e.g.. If I was a witch, I might be ugly ...I wouldn't like it at all.

Appendix A continued

Story-like	Writing is organized in story form, has episodic characteristics, may be " transitional " e.g..combines story characteristics with elaborated narrative-like lists
Story	Writing is structured in story form is episodic with other story characteristics such as characters, evidence of problem/solution or theme. The piece contains an initiating event and closure.
Other Genre	Writing is organized in story or poetic form with non-fiction qualities e.g. information, persuasive. This includes riddles, and poetry.

Appendix B

Written Language Characteristics
Language use that show a sense of audience, lively and engaging text, purpose, and certain other formal devices associated with written language

Titles and Formalized Beginnings & Endings.	" Jumping Rope" " The End " , "Once upon a time"
Dialogue	She said, " Who are you?"
Emotional Center or Voice Sense of Audience/purpose	The individual writer's voice comes through " ..... he is poor and can't afford to go to the hospital. Evidence of awareness of audience and purpose
Lively , Engaging or Poetic Language (writing may evidence building excitement or suspense)	" It was grew, and grew, and grew." " He was so, so, so scary."
Literary or Text-like Words or Phrases and Word order	" I have the key that opens the door to the future." " I'm going, just for fun, to play Arcada Games."

Appendix C

Writing interview: standard form

1. Are there some things you like about writing?
2. Say the whole class was going to write about a farm and Bob had been to a farm on his vacation but Ted has never been to a farm. Do you think writing this story would be easier for Bob, who has been to a farm, or Ted who has not?
3. Is writing like reading?
4. What's your favorite kind of story?
5. Do you like to write with friends or by yourself?
6. How can someone get to be a good writer?
7. Do good writers ever have problems?
8. Are there some things you don't like about writing/
9. Do you ever go back and write more on your story or make it different the next time?
10. What makes someone a really poor writer?
11. After you write do you ever think about it later in the day?
12. Are you a good writer?
13. What's more important when you write, getting the words right or making a good story?
14. What do you do if you don't know what to write?
15. Do good writers need to know how to read?
16. Can writing help someone learn to read better?
17. Is writing hard thing for you to do?
18. What's more important when you write, making a good story or spelling and handwriting?
19. Do you ever talk to some one or tell them about your story after you write?
20. What makes someone a good writer?
21. Do you make up pictures in your head when you write?
22. When a writer is stuck what can she/he do about it?
23. Would that help you?
24 Can a person be a good writer if she/he doesn't know how to read?
25. Say your teacher wanted you to write something which do you think you would write better, the teacher's story or one you wanted to write ?